

# To the Members of the STEVENAGE URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

GENTLEMEN :—

I beg to present my report for the year ended 31st December, 1898.

"During the year the health of the town has been satisfactory; 53 deaths have been registered as occurring within the district. Five of these should be subtracted as belonging to other parishes, and a like number must be added as taking place amongst our own residents in other districts. Taking the population at 3,600 (I think this is probably below the number, but in a place of this size which has lately been growing rapidly one has great difficulty in arriving even at an approximate figure), this gives a death-rate of 14.7 per thousand. The average death-rate among 10.2 millions living in rural districts from the years 1882 to 1886 was 17.7. During the year 1897 the deaths in Stevenage were 47, or 6 less. The chief difference is in the 'under one year of age period,' 13 as against 7 last year. At first sight this seems somewhat unsatisfactory as we have had no epidemic to account for it, but I notice in the returns that 4 babies did not survive their birth one hour. Of the adults 2 died as the result of accidents, 10 died between the ages of 70 and 80, 5 between 80 and 90, and 1 was over 90. The number of births registered was 95; 49 being males and 46 females. In 1897 the number was 89; 49 males and 40 females. This gives a birth rate of 26.4 per thousand.

"The year has been remarkable for the unusually mild winters, and the deficiency in the rainfall. Not only were many of the wells and springs in the neighbourhood, which had not been known to fail before for several years, dried up, but, unfortunately, owing to alterations at the Waterworks the town supply was extremely short. Many of the houses were almost without water for several weeks during the summer, but no diseases could be definitely traced to this. It was deemed advisable to draw a supply from some of the disused wells in the town for domestic purposes, but on my advice notices were posted on these warning the inhabitants against using the water for drinking. No doubt partly owing to the scarcity of water the new sewer was insufficiently flushed, and complaints were made almost daily of the offensive smells arising from the manholes. The Council ordered ventilating shafts to be erected at various points, and certainly these have practically remedied the nuisance.

"With regard to cottage property, I have unusual opportunities of becoming thoroughly acquainted with its condition from my professional work. I am glad to be able to say that a great deal which has appeared in my reports has been dealt with in a satisfactory manner, but from their previous experience it appears to be the custom of the majority of the offenders to ignore recommendations and even notices as long as possible, so that necessary improvements are not carried out perhaps for nearly a year; and as you know the same defaults have to be brought to your notice on numerous occasions, thus wasting a considerable quantity of valuable time. Though feeling with the Council that it is unwise and even unfair to take proceedings whenever chance offers, I cannot but think that, were one or two of the offenders made examples of, much time would be saved. In my last annual report I referred to various general defects, and, as they are still too common, perhaps it is a good thing to bring them again to your notice. As to overcrowding, three or four cases have been reported upon during the year, and, as I pointed out, the Council must face the difficulty that the dearth of cheap cottage property presents. Why should not a block of model dwellings be built by the Council? This appears to me to be the only solution of the difficulty. As an investment I believe it might give a fair return for the money laid out; at any rate this would not be difficult to ascertain. The more the overcrowding the more does the health of the town suffer, and should an epidemic occur the harder will it be to stamp it out. My next complaint is with regard to water closets without cisterns, which are extremely common. The Council cannot imagine that these will get a sufficient flushing. Stoppage of the drains does and will necessarily follow. When anything is said with regard to this one invariably hears that the cisterns are sure to crack in the frosty weather from want of care, and the expense to the landlords will be enormous. The average cottage property owner seems to think that beyond collecting the rent he has no responsibilities. I am sure in practice that the owners would devise some means of preventing this loss even if it caused them the inconvenience of looking over their property a little oftener; a result to be desired, as they would then become better acquainted with its condition. Now that the new sewer is in working order I hope to see all earth and ash closets done away with where possible. I drew the Council's attention last year to the damp condition of some of the cottages and also the bad state of repair of the yards; this is still noticeable. Lastly, I find that connecting the overflow of a soft water tank to the sewer is the usual practice. I cannot too strongly condemn this. I know of five or six cases where owing to a block in the drain the sewage worked back and discharged into the wells. New by-laws dealing with slaughter-houses have been drawn up and received your sanction. They are now awaiting the confirmation of the Local Government Board. Others with regard to nuisances are being prepared, and I hope in the course of the next month that you will seriously consider others dealing with milkshops, dairies and cowsheds. To draw your attention to the importance of frequent and careful inspection of all food supplies let me state that Sir R. Thorne Thorne in a recent lecture has very clearly demonstrated by statistics this fact, that whereas under improved sanitary conditions death from consumption of the lungs has been enormously reduced, yet consumption affecting the abdomen and brain (tubercular peritonitis and meningitis), which is almost always due to tubercular meat or milk, is rather on the increase, especially in rural districts. It is a well-known fact that stall-fed cattle, and cows kept in dirty and badly ventilated sheds are very liable to tubercular disease. I am extremely glad to hear that the Council intend to enforce the building by-laws, which they have left somewhat in abeyance of late

years, and that all new houses are to be carefully inspected and the drains thoroughly tested before the Surveyor gives a certificate as to their fitness for habitation. If report is correct and we are likely in the near future to have a great number of new cottages this decision will not have been arrived at any too soon.

"The town has fortunately been free from any epidemic during the last year. The only cases notified to me were five cases of erysipelas (which happened independently of one another), and one case of scarlatina. The last occurred in a boy three or four days after he had come back from a school which had broken up on account of the disease.

"Although we have been so fortunate this year we cannot always expect to be so. And I think, perhaps, the conscientious objection clause in the new Vaccination Act will increase the chance of an outbreak of small-pox. It is but fair to add, however, that the inhabitants of Stevenage and the surrounding villages are more enlightened than many others, and nearly all the children here get vaccinated. Still, I would most strongly urge on the Council the advisability of being thoroughly prepared: and, although we have a small isolation cottage hospital (I understand Stevenage was the pioneer in this direction among the neighbouring places) it would be of little use in the case of a widespread outbreak, and other provision would have to be made at very short notice. Another improvement I am most anxious to again get you to consider is a disinfecter. One cannot be sure of properly disinfecting bedding by burning sulphur in the room. Except in the case of the very poor, why should not a charge be made for its use? I think many of the surrounding villages would gladly avail themselves of its advantages.

"With regard to the post of inspector of nuisances, our late inspector, who, I would like to mention here, always gave me the greatest assistance, resigned his appointment in March. His successor was not installed until six months later, although I remonstrated more than once. This has naturally prevented me from carrying out much of the necessary work I had hoped to have done. I think the Council hardly realise the amount of inconvenience that being without an inspector for so long a period is apt to create. The Inspector of Nuisances seized a box of bad fish at our annual fair. I had it taken before a magistrate. He at once ordered it to be destroyed. This was the only example of unsound food which came to our notice.

"As I am requested to give a few details upon points, which, though familiar to you, may not be possessed by the Local Government Board or the Herts County Council, I trust you will not consider them superfluous.

"With regard to the geology of the town, so far as I have observed, most of the houses stand on a gravelly soil, though on the western side this is in places covered over by a varying depth of clay. On the eastern side the chalk comes close to the surface. The town itself stands some 305 feet above the sea level. It originally consisted of one long, wide street running nearly due north and south along the old North-road. It lies somewhat in a valley, the ground rising fairly rapidly on the eastern, more gradually on the western side. It also forms a watershed. The water at the southern end finds its way into a small stream which flows to Hertford, that at the northern end to Hitchin. A few years ago it was essentially agricultural in character; latterly a good deal owing to its reputation for health and the advantages of the railway it is rapidly becoming residential and urban. Although much of the building has taken place at either extremity, so that it now is nearly two miles long, a good many new cottages are being built on the eastern side, and a few on the northern and western part. Into the stream at the southern end all the sewage is ultimately discharged; until recently it received no previous treatment, now it is carried to the sewage farm, situated at the extreme southern end of the parish, beyond all the houses, where it is purified by broad irrigation. I inspected this stream a few days ago, and was much struck with the improvement in the appearance of the water.

"The main water supply is from a deep well sunk into the chalk. It is on the high ground at the northern and eastern part of the parish. The water is pumped out into a reservoir, and carried down iron mains into the town. It is the property and under the control of the Council. During the present time, owing to the increased demand, a new well is being sunk close to the old one. The well itself is finished, and at the present time the larger heading (130ft. long by 8ft. broad and 15ft. in height) is more than half completed. A smaller heading (54ft. long, 5ft. wide and 6ft. high) is also to be made to connect the well with the old bore hole. When I was down it a few days ago the water was coming in freely. Some of this is being pumped out into the reservoir and used as an auxiliary supply, thus doing away with the great inconvenience the town was suffering. The quality of the water, though naturally hard and at present sometimes a little chalky, is excellent. The main industry in the place is the joinery works of the Educational Supply Association, which employs some 150 hands.

"I am sorry to say that the Council after consideration have decided to postpone my recommendation to send round a scavenging and dust cart. I hope, considering the importance of the subject, that they will see their way to carry this out during the present year.

"I have quite recently inspected all the bakehouses in the district, and hope to send in my report about them at the next Council meeting. They were all in a clean and satisfactory condition. The milkshops, dairies and cowsheds will be visited very shortly, and a report furnished with regard to them.

"I enclose the usual forms of birth, death and sickness statistics."

I remain, Sirs, Your obedient servant,

R. A. DUNN, M.D., B. Hy.



